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'Perverse Opposition' to Afghan Aid

If ever there was a justified covert action, it has been the secret U.S. military aid to the rugged Afghan rebels who have been fighting and dying in combat against the Soviet invaders for more than seven years. Unlike the Reagan administration's controversial assistance to the Nicaraguan contras, the aid program for Afghanistan's *mujaheddin* has broad bipartisan support in Congress.

Unlike the contras, the Afghan rebels are freedom fighters unsullied by any ties to a previous dictatorship. The *mujaheddin* are also a genuinely indigenous movement; they will keep on fighting with or without American help.

The irony of the Afghan aid program is that from its beginning it has been opposed at every turn by the CIA.

The CIA's success in this perverse opposition is illustrated by the fact that for five full years President Reagan did not sign a national security decision directive laying out the purpose of the program and giving it official White House approval. Even

when the president finally did sign NSDD 166 in April 1985, it was over the vehement objections of the CIA.

The State Department also objected, and the document reached Reagan's desk only because of the persistence of Fred Iklé, undersecretary of defense for policy.

NSDD 166 stated for the first time the clear U.S. policy that aid to the Afghan rebels is intended to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan "by all means available." This is to be done by arming the *mujaheddin* to the point where they can either beat the Soviets (unlikely) or make their presence in Afghanistan so costly that they will pull out.

The U.S. covert action began in a modest way in 1980. Many of the Afghan men who fled into Pakistan and Iran after the Soviet invasion in December 1979 had simply seen to their families' safety and then headed back across the border with their antique rifles to fight the enemy.

President Carter was impressed, and the CIA anted up about \$30 million to help the self-reliant guerril-

las. The CIA resisted even this modest outlay.

The agency then discovered there was a surprising enthusiasm for the Afghan rebels on Capitol Hill. The initial leader was Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.), ranking minority member of the Intelligence Committee's budget subcommittee, who became chairman a year later. Wallop had a rule of thumb that astonished the CIA: whatever aid amount the agency suggested for the *mujaheddin*, he would double. Further confounding the CIA was the bipartisan support Wallop's double-the-money rule won in both the Senate and the House.

The agency maintained its stubborn reluctance, but congressional support for the Afghan rebels would not be denied: each year, the aid increased significantly, from \$50 million to \$65 million to \$75 million to \$162 million. This year's allocation is a whopping \$670 million, and supporters anticipate a cool \$1 billion in 1989.

Instrumental in the aid increase were Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), who was converted to the cause after a visit to the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, and Andrew Eiva, head of a shoestring lobbying outfit called the Federation for American Afghan Action. More help came from then-senator Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.), who sponsored the Afghan Effective Support Resolution. The resolution made clear that Congress favored "material aid . . . to help [the Afghan people] fight effectively for their freedom." The resolution passed both the Senate and the House unanimously.

Even with this resounding expression of congressional sentiment, there was continued reluctance at the CIA and in Foggy Bottom. But under Iklé's prodding, a secret intelligence study was produced that warned Reagan the Soviets were wearing down the *mujaheddin* and might eventually crush them unless U.S. aid was forthcoming.

That was enough for Reagan, and he signed NSDD 166.

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